

INFORMATION PROCESSING APPARATUS, INFORMATION
PROCESSING APPARATUS CONTROL METHOD AND
STORAGE MEDIUM

The present invention generally relates to information processing apparatuses, information processing apparatus control methods and storage media, and more particularly to an information processing apparatus and an information processing apparatus control method which process an input error and an unauthorized access by distinguishing the two, and to a computer-readable storage medium which stores a program for causing a computer to carry out such a process.

Recently, the size of information processing apparatuses such as personal computers have been reduced and the use of portable information processing apparatuses have become popular. To cope with such a trend, various techniques have been proposed to prevent unauthorized use of the information processing apparatus by a person other than the legitimate user.

Conventionally, a method has been proposed to put the information processing apparatus into a system-down state when a password input error with respect to the information processing apparatus occurs a predetermined number of times. In addition, a method has been proposed to display an analysis code when putting the information processing apparatus into the system-down state, by taking into consideration a case where the legitimate user forgets the password. In this case, the legitimate

user can notify information for confirming the
legitimate user's identity and the analysis code to
an information center which is connected to the
information processing apparatus, and inquire the
5 information center of the legitimate user's password.

For example, a Japanese Laid-Open Patent
Application No.8-314805 proposes a method which
automatically notifies information indicating
unauthorized use of the information processing
10 apparatus to the information center, when the
password input error with respect to the information
processing apparatus occurs a predetermined number
of times. According to this proposed method, the
information processing apparatus not only makes the
15 above described notification to the information
center, but also dumps data within the information
processing apparatus by enciphering the data and
sending the enciphered data to the information
center. After the enciphered data are stored in the
20 form of a backup copy in the information center, the
data within the information processing apparatus are
all erased.

Furthermore, as a system which prevents
the portable information processing apparatus from
25 being stolen, there is a proposed system which
generates an alarm when the password input error
with respect to the portable information processing
apparatus occurs a predetermined number of times,
until no more battery capacity remains within the
30 portable information processing apparatus.

However, in the case of the method which
displays the analysis code when the password input
error with respect to the information processing
apparatus occurs the predetermined number of times,
35 the analysis code is generated based on the password.
For this reason, there is a possibility that a
person other than the legitimate user may decode the

00020727:002704
FDZ60'2262600

On the other hand, in the case of the method which automatically notifies the information indicating the unauthorized use of the information

10 reason, even if the stolen information processing
apparatus is returned to the legitimate user, the
data within the returned information processing
apparatus are all erased.

15 which generates the alarm when the password input
error occurs the predetermined number of times until
no more battery capacity remains within the
information processing apparatus, the alarm is
stopped when the battery is removed from the
20 information processing apparatus. Consequently, as
a theft-preventing system for preventing the
information processing apparatus from being stolen,
this system does not have a high reliability.

25. DISCLOSURE OF THE INVENTION

Accordingly, it is a general object of the present invention to provide a novel and useful information processing apparatus, information processing apparatus control method and storage medium, in which the problems described above are eliminated.

Another and more specific object of the present invention is to provide an information processing apparatus and an information processing apparatus control method which process an input error and an unauthorized access by distinguishing the two so that a highly reliable theft-preventing

system can be realized, and to a computer-readable storage medium which stores a program for causing a computer to carry out such a process.

Still another object of the present invention is to provide an information processing apparatus comprising a storage unit; and a processing part which registers information of the information processing apparatus by transmitting to a first database of a registration center when a password input error is detected, and stores transmission log information related to a transmission to the registration center into said storage unit. According to the information processing apparatus of the present invention, it is possible to easily and positively prevent unauthorized use of the information processing apparatus when the information processing apparatus is stolen, and process an input error and an unauthorized access by distinguishing the two. In addition, since the data within the information processing apparatus remain stored, it is unnecessary to restore the data when the stolen information processing apparatus is returned to the legitimate user.

The processing part may include means for transmitting to a second database of the registration center if the transmission log information is stored in said storage unit, and for making a system lock with respect to the information processing apparatus if the information related to the information processing apparatus is registered in the first database or the second database.

The processing part may include means for outputting a warning if the information related to the information processing apparatus is registered in the second database.

A further object of the present invention

Another object of the present invention is to provide an information processing apparatus comprising a first database which registers information related to a first apparatus when notified of a password input error at the first apparatus, in response to a transmission from the first apparatus; a second database which registers the information of the first apparatus when the information related to the first apparatus is notified from a second apparatus and the information related to the first apparatus is registered in said first database, in response to a transmission from the second apparatus; and a processing part which controls registration of information to and deletion of information from said first database and said

The processing part may include means for deleting the information related to the first apparatus from said first database and/or said second database when a request to delete the information related to the first apparatus is received with respect to said first database and/or said second database, in response to the transmission from the second apparatus.

Still another object of the present invention is to provide an information processing apparatus control method comprising a step which registers information of an information processing apparatus by transmitting to a first database of a registration center when a password input error is detected at the information processing apparatus, and stores transmission log information related to a transmission to the registration center within the information processing apparatus. According to the information processing apparatus control method of the present invention, it is possible to easily and positively prevent unauthorized use of the information processing apparatus when the information processing apparatus is stolen, and process an input error and an unauthorized access by distinguishing the two. In addition, since the data within the information processing apparatus remain stored, it is unnecessary to restore the data when

The information processing apparatus control method may further comprise a step which transmits to a second database of the registration center if the transmission log information is stored in the information processing apparatus, and makes a system lock with respect to the information processing apparatus if the information related to the information processing apparatus is registered in the first database or the second database.

A further object of the present invention is to provide an information processing apparatus control method comprising a step which searches a first database of a registration center and registers information related to a predetermined apparatus into a second database of the registration center if the information related to the predetermined apparatus is registered in the first database.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an information processing apparatus control method comprising a step which registers information related to a first apparatus in a first database when notified of a password input error at the first apparatus, in response to a transmission from the first apparatus; a step which registers the

The information processing apparatus control method may further comprise a step which deletes the information related to the first apparatus from said first database and/or said second database when a request to delete the information related to the first apparatus is received with respect to said first database and/or said second database, in response to the transmission from the second apparatus.

Still another object of the present invention is to provide a computer-readable storage medium which stores a program for causing a computer to control access to a registration center, comprising means for causing the computer to register information of the computer by transmitting

5 According to the computer-readable storage medium of
the present invention, it is possible to easily and
positively prevent unauthorized use of the
information processing apparatus when the
information processing apparatus is stolen, and
0 process an input error and an unauthorized access by
distinguishing the two. In addition, since the data
within the information processing apparatus remain
stored, it is unnecessary to restore the data when
the stolen information processing apparatus is
5 returned to the legitimate user.

25 The computer-readable storage medium may further comprise means for causing the computer to output a warning if the information related to the computer is registered in the second database.

A further object of the present invention is to provide a computer-readable storage medium which stores a program for causing a computer to control access to a registration center, comprising means for causing the computer to search a first database of a registration center and register information related to a predetermined apparatus into a second database of the registration center if the information related to the predetermined

According to the information processing apparatus of the present invention, it is possible to easily and positively prevent unauthorized use of the

The computer-readable storage medium may further comprise means for causing the computer to delete the information related to the predetermined apparatus registered in the first database and/or the second database.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a computer-readable storage medium which stores a program for causing a computer to control access to a registration center, comprising means for causing the computer to register information related to a first apparatus in a first database when notified of a password input error at the first apparatus, in response to a transmission from the first apparatus; means for causing the computer to register the information of the first apparatus in a second database when the information related to the first apparatus is notified from a second apparatus and the information related to the first apparatus is registered in said first database, in response to a transmission from the second apparatus; and means for causing the computer to control registration of information to and deletion of information from said first database and said second database. According to the information processing apparatus of the present invention, it is possible to easily and positively prevent unauthorized use of the first

apparatus when the first apparatus is stolen, and process an input error and an unauthorized access by distinguishing the two. In addition, since the data within the first apparatus remain stored, it is unnecessary to restore the data when the stolen first apparatus is returned to the legitimate user.

The computer-readable storage medium may further comprise means for causing the computer to delete the information related to the first apparatus from said first database and/or said second database when a request to delete the information related to the first apparatus is received with respect to said first database and/or said second database, in response to the transmission from the second apparatus.

The program may form a portion of a control program or an operating system of the information processing apparatus.

Other objects and further features of the present invention will be apparent from the following detailed description when read in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a diagram for explaining the operating principle of an information processing apparatus control method according to the present invention for a case where an access is generated by an unauthorized user other than a legitimate user;

FIG. 2 is a diagram for explaining the operating principle of the information processing apparatus control method according to the present invention for a case where the information processing apparatus is used by the unauthorized user other than the legitimate user in a state where a theft registration of the information processing apparatus is not made;

00020727-002701

FIG. 3 is a system block diagram showing a system structure to which an embodiment of the information processing apparatus control method according to the present invention may be applied;

5 FIG. 4 is a flow chart for explaining the operation of a first embodiment of the information processing apparatus according to the present invention;

10 FIG. 5 is a flow chart for explaining the operation of a second embodiment of the information processing apparatus according to the present invention;

15 FIG. 6 is a flow chart for explaining the operation of a third embodiment of the information processing apparatus according to the present invention;

20 FIG. 7 is a flow chart for explaining the operation of the third embodiment of the information processing apparatus according to the present invention;

FIG. 8 is a diagram for explaining a data structure of management data; and

FIG. 9 is a diagram for explaining an input screen.

25

BEST MODE OF CARRYING OUT THE INVENTION

First, a description will be given of the operating principle of the present invention, by referring to FIGS. 1 and 2.

30 FIG. 1 is a diagram for explaining the operating principle of an information processing apparatus control method according to the present invention for a case where an access is generated by an unauthorized user other than a legitimate user.

35 FIG. 1(a) shows a process for a case where an unauthorized user 1 other than a legitimate user 10 uses an information processing apparatus 2. When

00938727-002704

2

FIG. 1(b) shows a process for a case where the legitimate user 10 thereafter realizes that his information processing apparatus 2 is stolen, and makes an access from a communication apparatus 11 other than the information processing apparatus 2. When the legitimate user 10 makes an access to the registration center 3 from the communication apparatus 11 in a step S11, a data search is made to determine whether or not the model information and the like related to the information processing apparatus 2 in which the password input error is generated is registered within the database DB1 of the registration center 3. If the model information and the like related to the information processing apparatus 2 in which the password input error is

FIG. 1(c) shows a process for a case where the unauthorized user 1 again uses the information processing apparatus 2 after the theft of the information processing apparatus is registered as described above. When the unauthorized user 1 attempts to again use the information processing apparatus 2 in a step S21, a step S22 confirms whether or not the transmission log information related to the transmission to the registration center 3 (in this case, transmission log information related to the transmission to the database DB1) is stored within the information processing apparatus 2. If the transmission log information is stored within the information processing apparatus 2, a step S23 makes an access to the database DB2 of the registration center 3, and carries out a data search to determine whether or not the theft of the information processing apparatus 2 is registered within the database DB2 of the registration center 3. If the theft of the information processing apparatus 2 is registered within the database DB2, a step S24 notifies to the information processing apparatus 2 a

message indicating that the theft of the information processing apparatus 2 is registered, that is, a warning message with respect to the unauthorized user 1 who is attempting to use the information processing apparatus 2 without authorization. A step S25 makes a system lock with respect to the information processing apparatus 2, and a step S26 displays a warning with respect to the unauthorized user 1. As a result, the unauthorized user 1 can no longer use the information processing apparatus 2, and the warning with respect to the unauthorized use of the information processing apparatus 2 is notified by a display with respect to the unauthorized user 1.

FIG. 2 is a diagram for explaining the operating principle of the information processing apparatus control method according to the present invention for a case where the information processing apparatus is used by the unauthorized user other than the legitimate user in a state where a theft registration of the information processing apparatus is not made.

FIG. 2(a) shows a process for a case where the unauthorized user 1 other than the legitimate user 10 uses the information processing apparatus 2. When the unauthorized user 1 makes a password input error with respect to the information processing apparatus 2 in a step S1 a predetermined number of times, for example, a step S2 makes an access to the database DB1 of the registration center 3, and thus, the model information and the like related to the information processing apparatus 2 in which the password input error is generated is registered within the database DB1. In addition, a step S3 stores a transmission log information related to the transmission to the registration center 3 (in this case, transmission log information related to the

5

10

15

20

25

30

35

A process for a case where the legitimate user 10 makes the password input error with respect to the information processing apparatus 2 a predetermined number of times, for example, is similar to that shown in FIG. 2(b).

Therefore, when the theft registration described above in conjunction with FIG. 1 is made and a password input error is thereafter generated at the information processing apparatus, it is possible to judge whether the password input error is caused by a password input error made by the legitimate user or caused by an unauthorized access made by the unauthorized user, thereby making possible to properly use the security. In addition, even when the theft registration is not yet made as described above in conjunction with FIG. 2, the system lock is positively made, as long as the transmission log to the registration center is stored within the information processing apparatus or, the model information and the like related to the information processing apparatus 2 in which the password input error is generated is registered within the registration center. For this reason, the security of the information processing apparatus

5
10

15

20

25

30

35

5 processing apparatus 2 is a portable personal
computer or the like including a CPU 21, a system
controller 22, a display 23, an input device 24 such
as a keyboard, a communication unit 25, a storage
unit 26 which stores control programs including an
10 operating system (OS) 26a, and a storage unit 27
including a nonvolatile RAM or the like. The system
controller 22, the display 23, the input device 24
such as the keyboard, the communication unit 25, and
the storage units 26 and 27 are connected via a bus
15 29. The information processing apparatus 2 forms
the first embodiment of the information processing
apparatus.

20 The CPU 21 controls the entire operation
of the information processing apparatus 2. The
system controller 22 controls various parts of the
information processing apparatus 2 which are
connected via the bus 29, under the control of the
CPU 21. The display 23 is provided to display
various kinds of information, and the input device
24 is provided to input various information
including a password and to input instructions to
the information processing apparatus 2. The
communication unit 25 is provided to communicate
with another apparatus which is connected to the
system via a wireless line. The communication unit
25 may include in addition to a modem or the like, a
wireless communication unit which is internally
provided or a wireless communication unit which is
externally provided with respect to the
communication unit 25.

For example, the storage unit 26 is made of a ROM or the like which stores the control

programs such as BIOS.ROM to be executed by the CPU 21, and this storage unit 26 stores data and the like and a program according to the present invention to be executed by the CPU 21. The program according to the present invention is realized as a portion of the control program. The storage unit 27 is made of a nonvolatile RAM (CMOS) or the like which can store data so as not to be erased even when the power supply is turned OFF, and this storage unit 27 stores information such as transmission log information related to a transmission to the registration center 3.

When the present invention is realized as a portion of the BIOS, the present invention carried out by a security process which is often called as a "Power On Password" and urges a password input after the power supply is turned ON. In other words, when the power supply of the information processing apparatus 2 is turned ON, the control program is first read from the BIOS.ROM, and a message urging the password input is displayed on the screen. A process which is carried out thereafter will be described later in the specification. When the input password is correct, the operating system (OS) stored in a hard disk unit which is not shown is read and the system is started.

The communication apparatus 11 is not limited to a particular type, as long as the communication apparatus 11 has a structure which enables communication with the registration center 30 and theft registration. In this embodiment, it is assumed for the sake of convenience that the communication apparatus 11 is formed by a personal computer such as the information processing apparatus 2. The communication apparatus 11 forms the second embodiment of the information processing apparatus.

In this embodiment, it is assumed that the communication between the communication unit 25 of the information processing apparatus 2 and a communication unit (not shown) of the registration center 3, and the communication between the communication apparatus 11 and the communication unit of the registration center 3 are respectively made via wireless lines by a known method.

This embodiment was described for a case where the process of the present invention is applied to the control program which is executed before the OS is started. By carrying out the present invention before the start of the OS, it is possible to obtain a high-level security. In addition, instead of realizing the present invention by the control program as in the case of this embodiment, it is also possible to realize the present invention by the OS. For example, in an OS which is known as MS-Windows, it is possible to make

a setting which requires a password input when starting the OS. In other words, the following procedure is carried out when the present invention is applied to the OS.

5 When the power supply of the information processing apparatus is turned ON, the control program is read from the BIOS.ROM, and various settings of the apparatus are made. After the settings, the OS is read from the hard disk unit and
10 started. The started OS displays a screen which urges the password input by an initial process thereof. Measures are taken so that the process of the present invention is carried out when it is detected that the user has made an erroneous
15 password input a plurality of times with respect to the screen display. The present invention is not limited to the application when the power supply is turned ON, the OS is started or the like, but is also applicable to any time the password input is
20 urged.

FIG. 4 is a flow chart for explaining the operation of the first embodiment of the information processing apparatus according to the present invention. More particularly, FIG. 4 is a flow
25 chart for explaining the operation of the CPU 21 of the information processing apparatus 2 by the program according to the present invention.

In FIG. 4, a step S41 decides whether or not the information processing apparatus 2 is in a
30 communicatable state. A step S42 decides whether or not a correct password is input from the input device 24 if the decision result in the step S41 is YES. If the decision result in the step S42 is YES, a step S43 decides whether or not the transmission
35 log information related to the transmission to the registration center 3 is stored in the storage unit 27. If the decision result in the step S43 is YES,

On the other hand, if the password input error is made a predetermined number of times, for example, and the decision result in the step S42 is NO, a step S47 decides whether or not the transmission log information related to the transmission to the registration center 3 is stored in the storage unit 27. The process advances to the step S44 if the decision result in the step S47 is YES. In addition, if the decision result in the step S47 is NO, a step S48 makes an access to the database DB1 of the registration center 3, and the registration center registers the model information and the like related to the information processing apparatus 2 in which the password input error is generated into the database DB1, while at the information processing apparatus 2 the transmission log information related to the transmission to the registration center 3 (in this case, the transmission log information related to the transmission to the database DB1) is stored within the storage unit 27, for example. After the step S48, a step S51 makes a system lock and the process

ends.

If the decision result in the step S43 is NO, a step S52 enables access to the information processing apparatus 2, and the process ends. In this case, the information processing apparatus 2 can be used in a normal manner.

In addition, if the decision result in the step S45 is NO, a step S49 makes an access to the database DB1 of the registration center 3 and searches within the database DB1. A step S50 decides whether or not the model information and the like related to the information processing apparatus 2 in which the password input error is generated is registered in the database DB1. If the decision result in the step S50 is YES, the step S51 makes a system lock, and the process ends.

On the other hand, if the decision result in the step S50 is NO, the step S52 enables access to the information processing apparatus 2, and the process ends.

FIG. 5 is a flow chart for explaining the operation of the second embodiment of the information processing apparatus according to the present invention. More particularly, FIG. 5 is a flow chart for explaining the operation of the CPU of the communication apparatus 11 by the program according to the present invention.

In FIG. 5, a step S61 decides whether or not an ID of the registration center 3 is set in the information processing apparatus 2. If the decision result in the step S61 is NO, a step S62 sets the ID of the registration center 3 in the information processing apparatus 2, and the process ends.

If the decision result in the step S61 is YES, a step S63 decides whether or not there is presently a possibility of an unauthorized use of the information processing apparatus 2 by the

5 decides whether or not the model information and the
like related to the information processing apparatus
2 in which the password input error is generated is
registered in the database DB1. If the decision
result in the step S65 is YES, a step S66 registers
10 the in the database DB2 the model information and
the like related to the information processing
apparatus 2 in which the password input error is
generated and is registered in the database DB1, and
the process ends. Hence, the theft registration of
15 the information processing apparatus 2 is made with
respect to the registration center 3 by the
legitimate user 10. The process ends if the
decision result in the step S65 is NO.

FIGS. 6 and 7 are flow charts for explaining the operation of the third embodiment of

5

10

20

30

5

10

20

35

5

15

30

35.

DB2. If the decision result in the step S102 is NO, a step S103 deletes the theft data from the database DB1, and the process ends after deleting the theft registration. If the decision result in the step S101 is NO or, if the decision result in the step S102 is YES, the process ends.

FIG. 8 is a diagram showing a data structure of management used in the embodiments described above. The management data shown in FIG. 8 are the theft data such as the ID, the date of theft registration and the time which are registered in the database DB2 by the step S96 shown in FIG. 7, for example.

FIG. 9 is a diagram for explaining an input screen. A confirmation block 81, an ID block 82, and a data block 83 are displayed as shown in FIG. 9 on the screen of the display of the communication apparatus 11.

A field 81a for inputting the user name of the legitimate user 10, a field 81b for inputting the model information such as the serial number (PC-Serial) of the information processing apparatus 2, and a field 81c for inputting the password (DB-Password) of the database are displayed within the confirmation block 81, and the information can be input to these fields 81a, 81b and 81c from the input device of the communication apparatus 11.

A field 82a for inputting the ID, and buttons 82b, 82c and 82d respectively for instructing "registration", "DB1 search" and DB2 search" are displayed within the ID block 82, and the information can be input to the field 82a from the input device of the communication apparatus 11. The "registration", "DB1 search" and DB2 search" requests to the registration center 3 can be made by clicking the corresponding buttons 82b, 82c and 82d by a pointing device such as a mouse of the

A field 83a for registering and deleting the theft data such as the date of the theft registration and the time with respect to the database DB1, a field 83b for registering and deleting the theft data such as the date of the theft registration and the time with respect to the database DB2, a button 83c for instructing "theft registration", a button 83d for instructing "deletion" of the theft data displayed within the field 83a, and a button 83e for instructing "deletion" of the theft data displayed within the field 83b are displayed within the data block 83.

For example, the first through third embodiments of the storage medium are formed by a storage medium used by the storage unit 26 or 27 shown in FIG. 3, a storage unit within an information processing apparatus other than the information processing apparatus 2 shown in FIG. 3 or, a recording medium which stores a program in a manner such that the program can be downloaded to the storage unit 26 or 27 of the information processing apparatus 2. The recording medium which forms the storage medium is not limited to a specific recording medium or specific storage unit, and may be formed by disk-shaped recording media such as a magnetic disk an optical disk, a magneto-optical disk, a floppy disk and a CD-ROM, card-shaped recording media such as an IC card, and semiconductor memory devices such as a ROM. Further, a portable recording medium may form the storage medium.

The first embodiment of the storage medium stores a program for causing a computer (CPU or the

like) such as the information processing apparatus 2 to carry out the process shown in FIG. 4.

The second embodiment of the storage medium stores a program for causing a computer (CPU or the like) such as the communication apparatus 11 to carry out the process shown in FIG. 5.

The third embodiment of the storage medium stores a program for causing a computer (CPU or the like) such as the registration center 3 to carry out the process shown in FIGS. 6 and 7.

Further, the present invention is not limited to these embodiments, but various variations and modifications may be made without departing from the scope of the present invention.

15

20

25

30

35